



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

NEWS RELEASE

SNAKE RIVER BASIN OFFICE

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SERVICES PUBLISH FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT FOR PROPOSED PLUM CREEK NATIVE FISH HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service ("Services") published today a *Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS)* for the proposed *Plum Creek Native Fish Habitat Conservation Plan (NFHCP)*. Plum Creek Timber Company wishes to implement a habitat conservation plan that would conserve native fish habitat on 1.6 million acres of Plum Creek land in Montana, Idaho and Washington. If, after 30 days, the Services' final decision is to issue an incidental take permit to Plum Creek, the NFHCP would be implemented at that time.

The Services released the *Draft EIS* and *Plum Creek Native Fish Habitat Conservation Plan (NFHCP)* on December 16, 1999. The public comment period opened with the notice of availability of the DEIS in the *Federal Register* on December 17, 1999. After one extension request, the public comment period closed on March 17, 2000. Following a full review of 83 public comment letters and additional comments from open house meetings in 6 locations across Montana, Idaho and Washington, many issues were identified that resulted in improvements to the NFHCP. The most notable changes were in the areas of adaptive management process, riparian management, road management and administration/implementation of the NFHCP. "The Services worked with Plum Creek to improve the draft documents in response to public comments received. With the help of the public review process, we hope the plan will be even more successful at meeting the four biological goals of providing cold, clean, complex and connected fish habitat on Plum Creek lands," remarked U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Director, Anne Badgley.

Almost 90% of the area covered by NFHCP occurs in Montana. The Plum Creek NFHCP adopts a multi-species aquatic ecosystem approach, spanning all watersheds within the Project Area. It is designed to maintain, improve, or provide habitat that serves the biological needs of 17 species of native trout, salmon and whitefish. Permitted activities would include forestry and related actions such as road-building. If issued, the NFHCP Permit would be for a 30-year period.

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The DEIS; the Plum Creek NFHCP; all public comments and the Services' responses to each; questions and answers; and maps may be viewed on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's website (<http://www.fws.gov/r1srbo/SRBO/PlumCk.htm>). A final full-text version of the NFHCP is available on the Plum Creek website (http://www.plumcreek.com/environment/trout_index.html). Copies may also be requested from the Services in hard copy or CD format.

For more information, please contact *Ted Koch*, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Snake River Basin Office, 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Room 368, Boise, Idaho 83709 or *Bob Ries*, National Marine Fisheries Service, 10215 W. Emerald, Suite 180, Boise, Idaho 83704.

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 93-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses 525 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 66 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

The National Marine Fisheries Service is the principal steward of the nation's living marine resources. It protects marine and anadromous species under the Endangered Species Act and Marine Mammal Protection Act. An agency of the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NMFS also regulates the nation's commercial and recreational fisheries. It manages species under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act throughout federal waters, which extend 200 miles from the coastline.